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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR CMGT TU
SUBJECT: SMOOTHING THE ENTRY OF TURKISH OFFICIALS INTO THE
UNITED STATES

¶1. (U) Action request at para. 5.

¶2. (SBU) A Turkish delegation headed by Minister of State Ali Babacan and Deputy Chief of the General Staff (DCHOD) GEN Ergin Saygun and including Undersecretary for Defense Industries Murad Bayar, TGS J-5 Strategy Division Chief MGEN Serdar Savas and other officials will travel to Washington to attend the annual American-Turkish Council (ATC) conference from March 25-28. Their participation in our largest bilateral business forum provides an opportunity to engage the Turkish businesses and government on US participation in the Turkish defense industry and address a host of bilateral issues from a Congressional resolution on an Armenian genocide to our cooperation against the PKK terrorist organization. However, following recent visits to the US, Turkish military and civilian officials have raised complaints about perceived discriminatory treatment at US ports. In an effort to ensure a productive visit on the eve of a possible genocide resolution and Turkish Presidential elections, post requests Department coordinate with the Turkish Embassy to smooth the entry of these officials in accordance with US security, immigration and customs requirements.

¶3. (SBU) Following is a list of specific complaints received about perceived unfair treatment of Turkish officials at US borders. While both civilian and military officials have complained of ill treatment during recent visits, the issue is of greatest sensitivity to the military who resist what they believe to be onerous security or immigration checks at airports and US government facilities that are not appropriate for their standing as a NATO ally:

-- The Ankara Office of Defense Cooperation (ODC) received a letter in June 2006 from TGS protesting that the delegation led by LTG Zorlu to the March 2006 ATC conference, which was traveling on NATO orders, had been sent to secondary inspection by Border Protection officials while seeking to depart the US at Reagan National Airport. The MFA followed up with us to ask how to avoid this and similar problems in the future.

-- During a November 2006 visit to Washington, GEN Saygun walked away from a meeting with NSC Hadley when security officials sought to "wand" him after he set off the magnetometer at the entrance to the OEOB.

-- Also in 2006, three Turkish parliamentarians traveling on diplomatic passports with A-2 visas were singled out of a group of European MPs for additional security screening before boarding a Washington to Tampa flight.

-- In January 2007, TGS sent a letter to ODC listing the TGS complaints above; requesting that Turkish military officials be accorded appropriate VIP treatment at US ports; and advising that if US could not accommodate this request, TGS may withdraw the right of US flag officers to VIP treatment when visiting Turkey. In the absence of a similar VIP lounge arrangement at US airports, and in accordance with required security procedures, post worked with DOD and State Protocol to ensure a smooth entry and exit for CHOD GEN Yasar Buyukanit during his February 11-16, 2007 visit to New York and Washington. Despite this, on March 5 TGS sent a second note to ODC stating that in the absence of revised protocol procedures for Turkish military officials visiting the United States, TGS would not accord VIP treatment to US flag officers who are not visiting Turkey at TGS invitation.

¶4. (SBU) Following each of the complaints noted in para. 3, post notified the appropriate USG agencies in an effort to gain a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding each incident and to pave the way for future visits. However, we understand that ultimate responsibility for ensuring the smooth passage of Turkish officials through the US entry and exit process rests with the Turkish mission in Washington. While the Turkish Embassy should be aware of the port courtesies available to foreign dignitaries and the procedures for requesting them, due to staffing turnover or other factors, it may not implement the necessary actions to secure them for every visitor.

¶5. (SBU) Action Request: To assist the Turkish embassy to facilitate this process, post requests the Department and other relevant USG agencies to inform their counterparts at the Turkish mission of the available courtesies and requisite procedures and help to facilitate their completion for the upcoming ATC conference and for future visits.

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